Dead Right

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Dead Right

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

Jack approached Will with a proposal, and Hannibal has mixed feelings about it.

Notes

Happy October everyone! Another installment of my ghost story series! This is a fun tradition, and I'm glad I started doing it. I've been looking forward to this all year.

See the end of the work for more notes

“I’m very impressed with your work, Will. I’ll be following your progress.”

Will allowed himself a small smile. He had been careful not to be too enthusiastic in front of Jack Crawford, because he didn’t want to seem too eager to please. It was a dangerous game to let yourself work too hard to impress before you even had the job. Will was only a trainee, but Jack had taken an interest in him before he had even gotten in.

Because of his paper about the Chesapeake Ripper.

“Thank you, sir,” Will said, “I hope to work with you after I graduate.”

Crawford smiled, and Will could see he had said the right thing. Crawford was the head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit in the FBI, meaning Will was on the fast track to get there as a criminal profiler. If Will could just keep up with his studies, and pass that dreaded psych eval he had heard rumor of, Jack would clearly be happy to have him.

Will had also written several papers on other killers, some evaluations of lesser crimes, and drawn up profiles for criminals based on the facts of their cases. He was good with forensics and alright with the physical aspect of being an agent, but his strongest suit was psychology. He could see the way Jack itched to get his mind on a team to chase killers.

Will was a commodity. Hannibal thought it quite amusing. Usually.

“I understand you live in the old Ripper house,” Crawford prodded, and Will realized he wanted to talk about Hannibal. That should be fine, as long as Will was careful.

“I do,” Will agreed with a nod, “Miss Chiyoh was impressed with me, I suppose, and she knew she would not live forever. She needed someone who would be able to keep the house the way Doctor Lecter had asked in his will. I just happened to appear at the right time.”

Crawford nodded, though he didn’t seem entirely convinced. He was suspicious about something, though of course he had no reason to suspect the truth. He just knew there was something strange about the whole situation.

“Chiyoh Murasaki traveled all the way here to sign the papers giving you possession of the property, and she left you the entire Lecter fortune. That’s quite an impressive inheritance from someone you hardly knew.”

Will raised his eyebrows, affecting an expression of surprise.

“Oh, no. You don’t quite understand, sir. By that time, we had been exchanging letters for a while, and we knew each other quite well. I don’t consider her a stranger, and I don’t believe she considered me one either by that point. I believe she came all this way mostly so she could meet me in person, and be sure I had not been trying to trick her. She wanted to be able to trust the person she left the house to. Doctor Lecter was very particular about how he wanted things to be done.”

Crawford frowned. He clearly wasn't entirely convinced nothing was amiss, but he didn't know quite what he thought was wrong with the whole picture.

"Why would you want to live in the Ripper house, not to mention maintain it to the standards Lecter asked?" Crawford asked, "I mean, I get accepting the offer of having a whole house, being a college student, no financial strings attached. But even then, most people would at least hesitate to live somewhere so many people had been killed and cannibalized."

Will smiled wryly. Jack was getting awful close to the truth, and he had no idea.

"You read my paper, Agent Crawford. You probably guessed I have an intense fascination with the Ripper. The reason I started writing to Miss Chiyoh in the first place was because I wanted to just have the chance to go inside the house. I don't spook easily, sir, and being offered guardianship of the property was an opportunity to study the Ripper more than I had hoped I would be able to. I never wanted to change anything, and if I was in her place I would have done the same thing. Finding someone who is passionate about something is the best way to be sure they will remain loyal to it. When Miss Chiyoh suggested the arrangement, it just made sense."

Crawford nodded, accepting that despite the fact Will could tell he was far from satisfied by it. Will expected Jack would come back around to this topic plenty more, but for the time being he would let it go.

"Keep up the good work, Graham."

Will recognized he was dismissed, so he nodded smartly and headed back to class.

As always happened when Will was called out of class for anything, he had briefly wondered if something had been found to connect him to the disappearance of Matthew, or one of the others who had pried too far into his and Hannibal's life. Of course, Hannibal didn't allow that to happen. Will didn't know exactly how it worked, but there was an aspect to Hannibal's supernatural nature that allowed him to hide his crimes thoroughly enough no one had even connected Will to Matthew far enough to ask him if he had known him. Not even Beverly.

Beverly was unhappy with Will. She hadn't been really happy with him since the night she had found out who Will had been seeing. She didn't condone their relationship, and she never hesitated to make that fact known.

Still, she hadn't called a priest yet, so he had hope that someday she would come around.

"You been assigned a case yet?" Beverly asked under her breath as Will sat beside her in the lecture hall.

She was convinced it was only a matter of time before Jack pulled him out of the classroom and dropped him directly into the field.

Will shook his head.

“Just Jack checking in on me again. Trying to figure out why I would ever want to live in the Ripper house.”

Beverly snorted softly.

“He wouldn’t believe you if you told him,” she said, “And he would rethink his decision to let you into the bureau. They generally don’t let crazies in.”

Will huffed softly.

Even if people would believe the ghost story, they would still label him as insane. Most people wouldn’t meet a dead serial killer and immediately jump into bed with him. Fewer still would commit to living in the house where said killer had performed his heinous acts for the foreseeable future, with said ghost. That wasn’t even to mention the fact that Hannibal hadn’t stopped killing people after he had died.

That was why Will was so nervous about the psych eval. He didn’t know if they would be able to tell this kind of thing about him. That was what he was afraid of.

Hannibal was helping him. Hannibal was a master at faking normal. He had gone for decades, killing and consuming the population of Baltimore, all while parading around as the darling of high society. If anyone could help Will pass the psych eval without raising any red flags, it should be Hannibal Lecter.

It still made him nervous as hell.

“Then you have no hope,” Will teased back, “your obsession with the gaschromatograph is enough to disqualify you in my books. It’s creepy.”

Beverly shot him a look, and turned back to her notes.

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“How was your day, Will?”

Will smiled as Hannibal kissed him, always finding it amusing how domestic these greetings were, all things considered. An outside view might look at it and think it was just a normal homecoming.

“Only a bit more interesting than usual,” Will said, “Jack asked for me. He wants to understand why I would agree to live in the infamous Ripper house. It’s not exactly typical behavior. I think he’s confused why Chiyoh would agree to it.”

Hannibal hummed softly.

“How unfortunate for him that she is no longer available for him to badger with his incessant questions.”

Will laughed.

Chiyoh had only died a month earlier. She had never had to deal with Jack and his prying. Will imagined Hannibal was sorry that he could no longer write to her, though he insisted he was more than satisfied having Will for company.

Will almost wished Hannibal was more obviously grieving for Chiyoh. The idea that even someone who had been close to him and his only company for many years meant so little to Hannibal made him worry about his own position in Hannibal's life. If something were to happen to Will, and he was lost to Hannibal, would Hannibal just continue on as if nothing had changed? Will wanted to believe he meant more to Hannibal than that.

"He's going to keep asking me about you, you know," Will said, walking with Hannibal to the kitchen. He could already smell something delicious. Hannibal almost always had something ready for him to eat when he got home, even when it was just a snack to tide him over for a far more elaborate dinner. "You're probably enjoying all the attention. You've been dead for decades, yet people still can't stop trying to understand you."

Hannibal was pleased. Will could see it, and feel it in the air. Being a ghost gave Hannibal some effectual influence over his environment. Rooms got colder when he was angry, Will got goosebumps when he passed by, and all sorts of little things. His energy lingered in a way that Will was intimately familiar with by now. He didn't have to see the ghost's expression to tell how he felt.

"I am flattered, certainly, though I worry it will wear on you to be the authority on the subject. I do not want my presence in your life to be a burden."

Will rolled his eyes.

Hannibal had made his life twenty times easier in most ways. Will didn't have to work while he was getting through school, didn't have to worry about where he would live or how he would pay for things, and Hannibal was an invaluable resource when it came to studying. He knew more than Will did on a lot of subjects, though Will was quickly catching up. When building a profile, Will could bounce ideas off of him and his feedback was better than anything he got at the academy.

Hannibal knew all that, and he was fishing for compliments.

"Someone ought to let everyone know how stupid they are," Will said, deciding to hold off on giving Hannibal what he wanted for a moment, "they don't think in a way that makes it possible for them to understand you. They aren't compatible."

There was a flicker of distaste from Hannibal as he prepared a plate for Will. It was just enough for Will to know his small tease had been noticed. Will had long since gotten past the need to keep the ghost from ever being unhappy with him. While it would be unwise for him to make Hannibal really, truly angry with him, it was safe enough to have small domestic disputes and disagreements. Hannibal wouldn't hurt Will unless Will betrayed him.

"Then I thank you for being my defender to the world," Hannibal said, pointedly not addressing the fact that he had not gotten a compliment after basically begging Will for one, "So many like me are left to the humiliating fate of being misunderstood by history."

Will grinned.

“There are no people like you, Hannibal,” he said, accepting the plate Hannibal offered to him, and deciding to take mercy on the poor ghost, “you are singular entirely, and I wouldn’t want you any other way.”

Almost at once, Hannibal’s agitation was soothed, and he offered his own smile. It was clear he wanted Will to say more, but he was glad he was finally being given some praise. All things considered, it was just about the funniest thing Will could imagine. The Chesapeake Ripper, vying for compliments from a college student. As if he wanted nothing else.

“Why, thank you, Will,” Hannibal said as they took their seats together, “your opinion is all I care about.”

Will laughed softly.

“I know, cher. That’s why you’re so desperate for me to say nice things about you. I guess you’re just bored by yourself here, all day, and you need some validation from me to know I still care.”

Hannibal pursed his lips, looking down at the food Will’s plate. He had been caught, and he knew it.

“And you take delight in denying me the pleasure,” Hannibal said petulantly, making Will laugh again.

“Darling, I just like having a little control sometimes,” he said, taking a bite of his dinner and humming in pleasure, “from the start, you’ve been prone to calling all the shots. I just take what I can get. Sometimes that means torturing you a little.”

Hannibal huffed and didn’t reply to that. They sat in silence for a while as Will ate, both knowing neither of them was really and truly upset. Hannibal was just stubborn and petulant, and Will was amused by his reaction to being denied something as small as praise. If the scholars knew that the Chesapeake Ripper could be driven to pout about something so simple and benign, they would burn their doctorates.

Eventually, Will took mercy on the poor ghost, offering him a small smile.

“Alright, fine. You’re the most brilliant man I’ve ever met, and you’re too clever for anyone in the FBI to understand. You’re an enigma of a man, and you make the best food this side of the Mississippi. Are you happy now?”

Hannibal smiled softly.

“Not at all,” he said, “You are by far the most immature, teasing, coquettish little thing I have ever had the misfortune to stumble across. I haven’t the faintest idea why I allow you to be a part of my life and take up space in my home.”

Will huffed.

“Legally, it’s my house now. Still, I could always start living on campus again. I’m sure Jack Crawford would be pleased to have me out of here, and closer to where he can get to me all the time.”

Hannibal’s expression immediately soured at the idea, a reaction he couldn’t hide. Though he wasn’t overly expressive as he was trying to conceal his feelings, Will could tell he had nearly panicked at the idea that Will would leave him. He could feel the ghost’s unease in the air.

“That won’t be necessary,” Hannibal said primly, trying in vain to smooth over his expression, “I would not want you to be surrounded only by imbeciles. Imagine the influence they would have if they were your only company.”

Will shook his head, grinning.

“And I suppose you wouldn’t be lonely at all if I were to leave,” he prodded further, “all alone in this big house, with only the memories of when I was here. You would probably be happier, then?”

Hannibal sighed.

“You are insufferable, Will Graham,” he said.

“And you’re a big baby,” Will replied, “but I love you anyways, and I know you feel the same way.”

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“You look tired.”

Will smiled. After dinner the night before, Hannibal had been particularly affectionate, and Will hadn’t gotten as much sleep as he usually tried to. He knew Hannibal had probably wanted him to be unable to think about anything else all day, and it was working.

What a baby Will’s ghost was.

“Didn’t sleep very well,” he said.

Beverly huffed.

“Your boyfriend have anything to do with that?” she asked, then grimaced, “nevermind. I don’t want the details. Don’t tell me.”

Will laughed.

“How are things going in your classes? If you need help, you’re welcome to join me for a study session in Hannibal’s library.”

Beverly scrunched her nose. Still she didn’t like spending time around Hannibal. He had never been anything other than polite to her, but she couldn’t get over the fact that he was a

serial killer.

“No thank you,” she said, “I think I’ll take my chances in the campus library instead. But I wish you all the luck in the world.”

Will shrugged.

Before the lecture had a chance to start, Jack Crawford himself walked in the door, his eyes sweeping over the gathered students before they landed on Will. It was clear he had something to talk to Will about. Again. Will hoped it wasn’t anything wrong, but he figured he would find out soon enough.

“I think I have to go,” Will told Beverly, gathering his things as he eyed Jack, “Let me know if I miss anything important.”

Beverly sighed.

“Whatever. Go on, posterboy. If you don’t put in a good word with me, I’ll kill you, and then you can be with your boyfriend forever.”

Will grinned.

“Sounds like a plan,” he said, “see you later.”

Will met Jack at the door, and the man looked satisfied that he hadn’t had to say anything for Will to do what he wanted. He was the kind of man who liked to be obeyed. Will thought that would get tiring, but for now he didn’t have to deal with him very often.

“Are you doing well in your classes?” Jack asked, tipping his head to bid Will follow him down the hall.

“I think so, sir,” Will said, keeping step with the older man, “the professors don’t exactly keep us updated on that kind of thing, but I haven’t had any problems yet.”

Jack nodded thoughtfully.

“I have a proposition for you, Will,” he said, and Will perked up, instantly curious and hopeful. “There’s a conference soon, in Pennsylvania, hosted at one of the colleges, but it’s for psychologists and psychiatrists from all over. They’re going to be discussing serial killers during a few panels, and they’ve asked the FBI to send an expert on the Chesapeake Ripper. I think you’re our best option, if you’re willing to take the assignment.”

Will furrowed his brow as he considered it.

This would be a really good opportunity to make an impression, and secure himself a place in the FBI for the future. He could make a name for himself.

But he would be away from Hannibal for a while.

“How long would I be gone?” he asked, “Will the FBI arrange everything?”

Jack nodded.

“Of course. We’ll get you a hotel room and make sure it’s all set for you. You won’t have to worry about any of that, and you’ll be excused from all your classes, so you don’t have to worry about that either. It’s a week long, and you’ll be included in three panels and a round table discussion. It’s a good chance for you to make some connections and show what you can do.”

Will nodded thoughtfully. It really did sound like a wonderful opportunity, and by all means he should accept the offer.

“Can I get back to you about it?” he asked, because Hannibal would never forgive him if he made this decision without discussing it first, “I need at least a day to think it over.”

Jack smiled.

“Not a problem. Just let me know by the end of the week. The conference is in a month. Think it over. I think it will be really good for you.”

Will smiled and nodded again.

“Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity, and I will think about it.”

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“You wish to leave,” Hannibal said, tracing patterns into Will’s ribs with his deft fingers. He flickered once, betraying his strong reaction to the topic.

Will huffed. He laid his head on Hannibal’s shoulder, wishing things were easier. Having Hannibal stuck here made things too complicated, and Will just wanted things to be simple for once.

“It’s not like I’m leaving forever,” he said, “Just a week, and it’s a conference. They want a Chesapeake Ripper expert, and you know that I’m the best they can get. It’s not like they could have asked you to go. I’ll just be there to talk about you and answer questions about you. I won’t be allowed to think about anything else. You should be pleased.”

Hannibal was very clearly not pleased. Because Will would be gone.

“They do not deserve you, širduk. They are all fools, and you should spend your time here instead. What will you eat?”

Will laughed. Hannibal’s arm tightened around him, pulling him close.

“I won’t starve, darling. I have enough money to only eat at the fanciest restaurants if I wanted to, you know that. And just think, when I get back, you can make whatever you want for me. You’ll have had all week to plan and prepare. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

Hannibal pouted. He was so prone to pouting these days it was hard not to laugh at him all the time. Will thought maybe he was starting to feel insecure about whether or not Will would actually stay with him. There was little Will could do to reassure him. Still, it was funny, considering who Hannibal was.

“I do not wish to be parted with you for so long,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled fondly at the ghost. Honestly, he didn’t want to be gone that long either. He hated the idea of falling asleep in a strange bed, all alone. Still, he didn’t get the chance to talk about Hannibal with other people all that often, not the way he wanted. And this was a good opportunity for him as well.

“I’ll call you every night before I go to bed, and when I get back I’ll take two whole days off of classes so I can spend it with you. Alright? Does that sound good? I can’t spend my entire life locked up here. I need to have a career eventually. I’d waste away, even with your care.”

Hannibal huffed softly. He clearly didn’t like anything about this. He wanted Will to stay here all the time. He believed, almost entirely, that he could make Will happier and healthier than anyone else, without anyone else. Even though he knew Will wouldn’t be entirely happy being cooped up like that, he wanted it. Will understood, and he wished there was some other way to do things. He wished Hannibal could go with him places.

Maybe someday they would figure out how to break whatever was binding him to the property.

“If you truly wish to go, I will not stop you. Just so long as you promise to return to me.”

Will smiled, pulling Hannibal into a kiss. He shifted closer into Hannibal’s side on the couch, relishing in the comforting coolness of his ghost lover.

“Always,” he promised.

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“You’re Will Graham?”

Will smiled nervously and nodded. The woman had lanyards laid out in front of her and a clipboard with a list of names. She quickly scanned over the list before looking back up at him with a smile.

“Would you sign here, please? I have to make sure everyone gets their badge and binder.”

Will nodded again and quickly signed by his name on her list, handing it back to her in exchange for one of the lanyards and a binder of papers.

“Gosh, you look young,” the woman said as she checked that he had signed in the right place, “I don’t know if I’ve ever seen someone who isn’t starting to turn grey at one of these.”

Will huffed a laugh.

“It’s my first time,” he said, “have any tips? I’m pretty nervous.”

The woman offered him a sympathetic look.

“Just don’t let them intimidate you,” she said, “Everyone here is an expert in something, and they usually think they’re the smartest person in the room. They’re used to being the smartest, but when you’re here, everyone is smarter than you about something. Just keep to your topic and don’t let them scare you.”

Will nodded, his heart skipping in his chest at the idea that people here would be trying to make him scared.

“That binder has all the information you should need,” she continued, “schedules and a map to help you find your way around. If you get confused, just find someone wearing one of these badges like mine, and they should be able to help you with whatever you need.”

Will looked at the badge she was wearing, filing that away for future use.

“Thank you,” he said, “I just hope I don’t make a fool of myself.”

The woman offered him another reassuring smile, encouraging him. He was grateful for her kindness, especially because he felt the distance between himself and Hannibal like a physical thing.

Will opened the binder as he walked away, finding that the first day of the conference didn’t have him scheduled for anything. That was a relief. It would give him some time to understand what the expectations of him were, and he would be able to get used to the layout of the center.

Will decided his first step was to find the food court. He needed to see what his options were for food, and maybe get something he could carry around with him during the day. Despite what he had told Hannibal, he had no intention of only eating in the most fancy restaurants around. He had a whole week where he didn’t have to worry about coming home and having Hannibal smell fast food on him. The disappointment was always a tangible thing between them, and it was exhausting.

This week was for him alone, and he would take some enjoyment out of it.

But he did miss Hannibal. He missed Hannibal desperately.

Will found the food court, most seats already filled with people dressed in suits and fine clothes, though the colors were muted and boring. He felt suddenly out of place more than before, wearing the clothes Hannibal had chosen for him. It had been one of the small concessions he had made to the ghost before coming.

He was wearing a blue shirt and a suit with blue and green details. Hannibal had picked it for him, saying it made his eyes appear brighter. Will was just glad it wasn’t one of the plaid monstrosities Hannibal liked. While Hannibal managed to pull them off, Will knew he never

could. Still, this suit was much more fancy than anything anyone else was wearing, and had more color.

He was sure to make an impression. He just had to be careful it was the right one.

Will found a food stand that was selling pretzels, and he bought himself one with cheese. Instead of searching for a place to sit where he wouldn't be intruding on one of the other guests of the conference, he decided to wander for a bit and learn the layout of the center.

Will took small bites of his pretzel as he walked, checking the numbers by each door. Some were opened, letting him see as men and women milled about, either taking seats or standing up from them. They all conversed with one another formally, a feeling of professionalism permeating the air and nearly choking Will with it. It felt as if he was a child again, standing in church beside his father and aware that fidgeting would draw the attention and judgement of all the adults around. He had to behave, or else.

Will continued to check his map, making note of each correlating room number so he would be able to find his way around later. Hopefully without the help of the map.

As he passed one door, Will heard a voice that made him stop. The door had been left open a crack, and the words being said leaked out. He didn't recognize the voice, but the words caught his mind and held him in place.

"That's why the FBI has always failed to catch serial killers like the Chesapeake Ripper before far too much damage has been done. They study the minds of humans, and think that will help them to catch monsters. People like Rodney Alcala are simple, and far too human to be compared to the likes of H.H.Holmes and Hannibal Lecter. Humanity does not exist within their bodies, even in the smallest amounts."

Will scoffed and stepped forward, pulling the door open just enough for him to slip inside. He was in the back of the room, so the audience of the panel were facing away from him, but the speaker, the man behind a table and flanked by two other formally dressed monochrome men, was facing toward him. They were wearing lanyards like Will's and he could just make out the name of the man speaking, because he held it in one hand just above the table, as if he wanted to make sure people knew his name.

Fredrick Chilton.

Will recognized that name. He thought the man was the one who ran the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. If so, he wondered what he was here as an expert on.

He was going to be a part of the round table Will was asked to be in. If this was the way he thought, Will expected that to be interesting, but probably also frustrating.

"No one knows what makes these monsters the way they are," Chilton continued, gesticulating lazily, as if it was all just casual and common to him, "they are simply not human, and therefore do not have the same rights as humans. We do not have to feel pity for them, or show any mercy. When you spend enough time around such monsters, you start to

understand that they are basically animals. Such base forms that they cannot feel love or sorrow."

Will couldn't help a soft snicker, and it caught the attention of one woman who was sitting near him. He cleared his throat and offered a soft smile of apology. When he looked back up, Doctor Chilton was looking directly at him. His expression was curious, but cold. He thought Will was trying to interrupt him, but it was clear he was also intrigued by the kid who stuck out like a sore thumb among all these professionals.

Sheepishly, Will held up his own badge, hoping that would be explanation enough.

Chilton's eyes flicked to Will's name, and recognition passed over his features. He huffed softly and tipped his chin up. It was a nearly snobbish gesture that instantly made Will dislike him.

"I'm sure we will all learn exactly how true this all is when we hear from the up and coming expert on the Ripper, who has just joined us. Give a wave, Will Graham."

Everyone in the room turned and stared at him, and Will swallowed hard before lifting his hand in a polite wave. He tried to project confidence, smiling in the same way Hannibal did. If he could just be like Hannibal, no one would be able to make him ashamed.

Chilton laughed from up at the front of the room, drawing attention back to himself.

"I didn't know the FBI employed children, but I'm sure it will be a lot of fun to talk to you. We're done here, if you want to come talk to me."

As he said it, each door of the room was pulled open, and the audience stood to leave. They all began to file out, and Will stepped to the side to let them pass. He wasn't sure he wanted to talk to Doctor Chilton, but he felt compelled to accept the invitation, if only to learn more about the man he was meant to speak with in the following days.

When the room was nearly empty, Will walked up to where Doctor Chilton and the other two men were standing. Chilton looked at him with a smug expression, as if he expected to publicly humiliate him and enjoy every minute of it.

Will steeled himself, remembering to behave as if he was Hannibal. He smiled politely and offered his hand to Doctor Chilton.

"A pleasure to meet you, sir. I apologize if I interrupted earlier. I heard you from out in the hall and couldn't help myself. You had some interesting things to say."

Doctor Chilton shook his hand, making a soft, considering sound. Will shook the hands of the other men as well, each of them offering their names in polite greeting. Chilton never looked away from Will, studying him like some new and fascinating subject. Considering his job, Will didn't much like the way he stared.

"By the look on your face, I would think you don't agree with me," Chilton said, as if that was nearly unthinkable.

Will smiled.

“I don’t see any reason why we can’t get along, even if our opinions differ on some trivial subjects,” he said lightly, “I look forward to discussing it all further with you in the coming days.”

Chilton’s expression flashed distaste, but he quickly hid it behind his affect of smug pride.

“Well, I don’t suppose we should have too high of expectations from someone so young. Did Jack Crawford send you so you could learn from the best?”

Will felt irritation rise up in his chest, but he pushed it down. An idea sparked, and he lowered his gaze. He played at meekness, recognizing Chilton was particularly vulnerable to that kind of act.

“I hope to learn from as many people as I can this week, sir,” he said, fighting the urge to gag at how sickly sweet he sounded, “it’s an honor to be sent here by the FBI. I want to learn everything I can so I can help hunt down killers some day.”

That pleased Chilton, and Will felt like he needed to take a shower. He felt gross for having bent to the man, even if it was just an act. He wanted Hannibal.

“Well, I’m sure we’ll learn plenty from each other tomorrow. Perhaps we should postpone any further conversation until then, or else we might spoil the fun.”

Will offered a shy smile and nodded, pleased Chilton had offered it, as if it had been his own idea. It was what Will had been wanting, and now it would be all the more humiliating for Chilton when they finally got to speak in front of an audience together.

“If that’s what you want, sir,” he said, bowing his head in deference, “then I’ll be going for now. I want to learn my way around before I’m expected to show up anywhere. I’ll see you again tomorrow.”

Will nodded to each of the men and made his escape, sighing in relief the moment he was away from them.

Will looked at his map again, turning to explore the rest of the building. He was here to do a job, and he intended to do it.

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Will flopped back onto the bed in the hotel room, closing his eyes and letting out all the air in his lungs. He was exhausted.

After the abrupt introduction Doctor Chilton had given him, he had dealt with people recognizing him and wanting to talk to him frequently for the rest of the day. It seemed that everywhere he went, there was at least one person who had seen him there, and had some question or other about what he was doing there.

The few panels and discussions he had been able to attend had been fascinating, and he was actually glad he was here. But it was truly exhausting.

Will grabbed his phone and called the house, glad he didn't have to worry about whether or not Hannibal would answer. It wasn't like he had anything else to do, or anywhere else to be.

"Will," Hannibal said at once, basically purring it through the phone.

Will smiled, Hannibal's voice like a balm on his nerves.

"Hey, Hannibal," he said, "how have you been today?"

Hannibal sighed dramatically, making Will's smile widen.

"Entirely bored out of my mind," Hannibal pouted, "I do wish you had not left. I miss you."

Will's chest lurched, feeling as if something was pulling him toward the ghost, back home. He wanted to be there, and curl up with Hannibal on the couch or in their bed. He missed the cool touch of his lover, and the way he cared and understood.

"I miss you, too," Will said honestly, "but I have a job to do. I think you would find it funny to see the way people act here, and the way they talk about you. Tomorrow should be fun."

Hannibal hummed, and Will imagined they weren't apart. He pictured Hannibal there with him, reclining on the bed beside him.

"Tell me about your day," Hannibal requested.

Will obliged. Despite how tired he was, he couldn't bear the thought of ending the call to go to sleep. He craved Hannibal's voice, since he couldn't have his touch or presence in any other way. He wanted to keep talking to Hannibal for as long as he could.

He fell asleep with Hannibal still on the phone, his ghost's voice in his ear, soothing him and carrying him into a deep sleep.

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"You're wrong."

A hush fell over the room as Doctor Chilton turned to look at Will, irritation evident on his face. Will smiled coolly, not allowing anything to faze him. He was here on Hannibal's behalf, after all, and he intended to make him proud.

"I beg your pardon?" Chilton asked, his anger seeping through the words.

Will nodded to him, accepting the request.

"Pardon granted," he said, "what I mean is that I have issue with every single thing you have said regarding the Chesapeake Ripper."

Will was amused by the way the energy of the room shifted at once, many of the audience turning toward his side while others hardened against him in defense of Chilton. This would be an interesting conversation, but no one was more prepared for it than Will.

“Please, Mister Graham,” Chilton said, gritting the words out between his teeth in an attempt to appear unaffected, “explain your gripes.”

Will smiled and nodded.

“Thank you, sir. You posited that the Chesapeake Ripper, and those like him, are incapable of feeling human emotion. To the point that you think they should not be considered human. I disagree with every point you have raised, and I will begin with the implication that there are killers *like* Hannibal Lecter.”

Every person in the room had gone still and quiet to listen, and Will understood why. As far as he had found, not a single person had ever spoken about the Chesapeake Ripper this way. He had better be able to defend his stance, or they would eat him alive.

He could.

“Hannibal Lecter was not crazy,” Will said, facing the audience entirely and ignoring the others at the table with him, “and he felt emotions deeply, perhaps more intensely than most people. It’s clear through his work that he is deeply affected by his experiences, and his appreciation for beauty belies his intense experience of emotions. He was an anomaly entirely, and cannot be compared to other killers in any facet. Take Devon Silvestri, for example. Entirely by accident, one scene he left behind happened to match some of the patterns of Ripper murders. The difference that is glaringly obvious to anyone who has seen a Ripper murder is *intention*. Silvestri had no intention to kill, and less intention to create. The Ripper was an artist in his core, and used his murders as a medium through which he displayed his skills. He also used them to express himself emotionally.”

Will felt almost as if Hannibal was there with him, and he had to force himself not to smile.

“Art is the expression of emotion. As another example, and one that is more recent so more of you might be familiar with it, we can take Tobias Budge. He tried to be like Hannibal Lecter. He tried to create. He tried to be an artist. The reason he failed to do so, and in my opinion the reason he was caught so easily, is because he truly is a monster as Doctor Chilton supposes. He does not experience the emotions required to truly be an artist.”

Will was enjoying himself far more than he had expected. He couldn’t wait to tell Hannibal all about it.

“There is a pattern among serial killers, and while it is not a rule, it is a clear trend. Those who get away with it for the longest, have the highest victim count, don’t spend a lot of time with the scene and the bodies. They don’t display them. They don’t create art. This is only one way in which Hannibal Lecter deviates from others, but it might be the most striking example. He was a hugely prolific killer, and he was creating intensely intricate and detailed scenes with many of his victims’ bodies. Tobias Budge was caught after only one, because he left evidence. He wasn’t as good as the Ripper. The Chesapeake Ripper was a master of his

craft, and cannot be compare to any other killer. If you want to say he is not human, you cannot rightly pose that he is less. If anything, I think there's evidence to suggest he was more than human."

Will turned to Doctor Chilton again, offering a pleasant, casual smile.

"In Forensics, there's one core principal that the rest of the field is built around. Locard's Principle states that every contact leaves a trace. This means that any action, by any person, leaves behind evidence that we can gather and study in order to establish a sequence of events and track them back to the killer. When dealing with Doctor Lecter, this core principle of Forensics did not apply. He was not caught for decades, because he operated during that time without leaving any traceable evidence, despite the amount of time he spent with each scene and body. You compared him to H.H.Holmes, which was an interesting, but unfortunate choice. At the time that Herman Webster Mudgett was operating in his blood palace, the way law enforcement worked was primitive and subjective, and entirely ineffective. He got away with killing for so long because of that. As the years progress after the Ripper was caught, and as the science used to catch killers evolves, we continually return to the case of Doctor Hannibal Lecter to see if there is more we could have done were he to be a killer now. Every time, the answer is that the sheer lack of evidence at each of his scenes would still make it impossible for us to have caught him any sooner."

It was as if the audience was under a spell, and Will understood how Hannibal felt when he served those fancy dinners to all those people, enchanting them with his manners and talents. He smiled brightly and spread his hands, knowing he was the center of attention and pleased he was prepared to defend his lover.

"I apologize if I derailed the conversation a bit. Thank you for allowing me to speak my mind."

Chilton was red with anger, and Will was satisfied that the audience was witnessing the dichotomy between them. The young college kid remaining calm while the experienced professional lost it entirely. It would lend credence to Will's opinions, and might sway some of those who had initially thought he was nothing more than an arrogant child. The way he was dressed had contributed to the first impression that he was not as smart as he believed himself to be. Now, they would see it as a statement of his earned confidence. People like Chilton might begin to see it as something like the coloring of poisonous animals. A warning not to take him too lightly.

"That was quite an impressive statement," one of the other psychologists interrupted, likely trying to spare Chilton from further embarrassment, "now we can all see that the FBI really does only take the best."

There was a ripple of soft laughter and agreement from the crowd, and the psychologist turned back to Will curiously.

"As the expert on the Chesapeake Ripper, what do you think was his ultimate downfall? Was it just good police work, or did he make a mistake?"

Will smiled. This was something he'd actually discussed with Hannibal a lot. He loved being able to tease his ghost about it, because it was a little bit silly.

"It was whimsy, pure and simple," he said, "Hannibal Lecter was a romantic, and that was what made him flirt with danger. He found it exciting to dance with law enforcement, and he wouldn't have been caught if it wasn't for the fact that he did have such a love for beauty and the fantastic. He liked to leave secret messages, and trails that no one could follow but him. Connections between the victims that no one could see. Invisible like spider webs. He was caught because he played a game that happened to coincide with the workings of one particular mind, who followed the trail back to him. It's as simple as that."

Will felt the energy in the room shift again, and he knew the majority of the audience had come to like and agree with him. They were on his side, now. He was pleased.

"Wow," another psychologist said, "I read the paper you wrote on the Ripper, but I still had no idea just how well you'd gotten to know the killer. He was dead before you were born, but it's as if you've met the man."

Will laughed politely, the audience following his lead.

"I could teach a whole class on just the one man," Will said, "there are details about him that have never been made public, but they really do help to understand what he was like as a person."

"I think it's frightening, how you seem to idolize such a monster," Chilton cut in again, his anger showing through his tone again, "I hear you even live in the Ripper's abandoned house. You're just as sick as he was."

The mood in the room soured, and Will turned to look at Chilton coolly. He was not threatened, but he was insulted. Chilton didn't understand anything, yet he paraded himself around as some kind of authority.

"To overcome something, you first have to understand what a perfect engine it is," he said, "it's how you fight disease. If someone like Lecter ever appears again, understanding the one that came before will be the only way to catch them before they manage to do the same amount of damage. As far as my living arrangements go, that's really none of your business. Suffice it to say, Chiyoh Murasaki bequeathed it to me so that I would be able to focus on my studies and not have to worry about my living situation. It was a gracious act by someone I deeply respected, so I would ask you speak with more respect yourself, thank you."

At once, Will felt the audience direct immense ire towards Chilton. They saw that he had just been rude not only to a young man who had bravely come face to face with him on a subject they disagreed about, but also a dead woman who had never done wrong in their eyes. He was being disrespectful, and they all wanted him to demure.

That wasn't Chilton's style, though. Will had known that from the start. He wouldn't back down, even when everyone knew he was wrong. This worked in Will's favor, because he had manipulated the circumstances.

“You might have sold it and bought your own house,” Chilton tried, floundering now and growing more red with his frustration, “you don’t have to live in that house.”

Will smiled wryly.

“No, I suppose not. I might have sold the house to someone who would make it into a museum of horror, couldn’t I have? A tourist trap for ghouls, people who thrive off the suffering of others. In what way would that be better, I wonder, than moving on past what it once was and cleansing it of the evil that once lived there?”

Another murmur of agreement from the audience, and Will thought he could leave today and be satisfied with what he had accomplished. The idea that he still had a few days of this was both irritating and thrilling.

One of the other psychiatrists piped in, forcing the conversation away from Hannibal and taking the focus away from either Will or Chilton. Will could see that Chilton was angry to no longer be the center of attention, but he didn’t do anything to desperately bring it back to him. Maybe he knew he had met someone who was more than his match.

The rest of the panel passed without incident, and Will packed up his things calmly. He thought about getting one of the soft pretzels again, and maybe something from one of the Asian stands. They had looked good the day before, but he hadn’t found an opportunity to try them.

“I thought you respected your superiors, but I guess I was wrong about you. You acted that way to get my guard down, didn’t you?”

Will looked up to see Doctor Chilton standing over him, still fuming over his humiliation.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I don’t understand what you mean. I told you quite plainly yesterday that I disagreed with you, and it was you who suggested we not discuss it before today so as not to spoil it. I only did what you wished.”

Chilton’s lip pulled up in an aborted snarl as Will stood from his chair.

“Did you only attend this conference so you could try to humiliate those above you?”

Will shifted his expression, widening his eyes to appear innocent and curious.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said innocently, “aren’t we all just colleagues here? I don’t answer to you. And I didn’t *try* to do anything. I just did. It’s not my fault you forgot who I am.”

Will turned and left the room, leaving behind a fuming and humiliated man. He had never felt so satisfied, and he couldn’t wait to tell Hannibal.

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“How did it go today, Will?”

Will groaned softly.

“I bit off more than I want to chew,” he answered, “After I flayed Chilton in front of everyone, I couldn’t escape the questions and conversations. Everyone wanted to talk to me. Even people who weren’t there at the time tracked me down later to ask me about you. As much as I love talking about you, I hate people enough I’m entirely wiped out.”

Hannibal tutted softly through the phone, though Will could feel his smile.

“My poor Will, I do wish I was there to offer you comfort. You have had such a tiring day.”

Will snorted at the mockery in Hannibal’s tone.

“I have a round table with Chilton tomorrow, and he’s probably a part of the panel I’m on the next day as well. I hate him so much. He’s going to do everything he can to make a fool of me. I’m just lucky he’s an idiot.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement.

“You seem to have made quite the impression. How do you think Jack Crawford will react when he hears?”

Will blinked. He hadn’t even thought of that. Jack certainly hadn’t sent Will with the intention of having him fight every psychiatrist and psychologist who thought they knew something about the Ripper. Would he be upset? Had he expected that Will would be so protective of the subject which he claimed expertise on that he would verbally attack anyone who dared to speak of it with ignorance? Surely not.

“I sure as shit hope he laughs about it,” Will said, “otherwise, I’m screwed.”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh.

“You have made an enemy today, and I cannot find it in myself to be displeased about it. If the man is as unintelligent as you say, he poses no real threat. All he is is an opportunity for entertainment.”

Will shrugged, smiling. Maybe he would get a business card from Chilton before the week was up. For Hannibal’s records.

“We can hope,” he said, “he might also be a pebble in my shoe now. Baltimore is close to Quantico. Close enough he could be annoying to me for a long while yet. And, he obviously knows where I live.”

Hannibal was smiling when he replied.

“I’m sure we can deal with that if it comes to it,” he said.

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Will shuffled in the front door, too exhausted to properly lift his feet. His sleep had been poor in the hotel, not because the bed was uncomfortable but simply because he had been alone. On top of that, his week had been filled with social interactions and exhausting displays of politeness that he wasn't used to. Every day had been a test of his patience and ability to put on the facade he had made in Hannibal's image.

But he was finally home.

Hannibal wasn't there, in the foyer as Will had expected.

With a frown, Will flipped the switch for the lights, and furrowed his brow when the house remained dark.

"Hannibal?" he called, hearing the telltale shift of the house that meant Hannibal was active and listening. Still, the ghost made no appearance, and didn't respond.

Will huffed in annoyance and made his way to the stairs. He was too tired to play games today, and he just wanted to go to sleep next to his lover.

Will knew the house well enough that navigating in the dark wasn't even a challenge. What caught his attention, though, was that the lights in the foyer were flickering behind him. Like a stereotypical haunting.

Finally in the bedroom, Will began peeling off his clothes on his way to the bed. He felt gross and dirty, but he was too tired to think about taking a shower yet. He wanted Hannibal.

Will flopped down on the bed when he was down to his underclothes, staring up at the mirror on the ceiling. He remembered that first night here, when Hannibal had forced him to meet his own eyes in that mirror and tell him what he saw. Today, he looked as exhausted as he felt, but he was happy to be there.

The bed dipped as Hannibal's weight settled on top of Will, and at once he felt all the tension leave his muscles. He couldn't see his ghost lover yet, but just the feeling of his presence was a comfort.

"Hannibal, I missed you," Will said, and the man flickered into view above him. Just like that first night.

"I have missed you too, my love," Hannibal said, leaning down to kiss him. When Hannibal pulled away, he wrinkled his nose. "You smell of other people. I will go make dinner for you, but please take a shower before you come down."

Will sighed, unable to hold back a smile. His lover was fussy, but he was perfect.

"Alright," he said, "but after dinner it's right to bed. I'm exhausted."

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh, smoothing his cool hands over Will's face. Will wished he would never stop touching him.

"As you wish, širduk."

End Notes

There we go! Not much ghost action in this one, but I just loved the idea and had to write it. I have ideas for the next two installments of this series, so for at least two more years I'm good. That being said, I would love some feedback and suggestions of things you guys would like to see happen with these two. Having Hannibal be a ghost opens up some interesting opportunities, and we can have a lot of fun with it.
Thank you for reading my little story, and supporting my silly little hobby. <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!